

**Institute for Non-Lethal Defense Technologies**  
**Report:**

# BALLISTIC GELATIN

**February 2004**

**PREPARED BY:**

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PENNSTATE



APPLIED RESEARCH LABORATORY



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**Applied Research Laboratory  
The Pennsylvania State University**



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## **BALLISTIC GELATIN**

## **Ballistic Gelatin**

*This is a reference document for ballistic gelatin. It includes a summary discussion of ballistic gelatin's properties and utility, samples of test firings into ballistic gelatin, a set of procedures for preparing ballistic gelatin, and an extensive set of references on ballistic gelatin.*

### **Introduction**

Ballistic gelatin is designed to simulate living soft tissue. It is the standard for evaluating the effectiveness of firearms against humans because of its convenience and acceptability over animal or cadaver testing. The two issues that remain to be resolved are standards for the preparation of ballistic gelatin and the direct relation of gelatin test results to effectiveness of firearms against humans. These issues are related in the sense that gelatin can (in principle) be formulated to simulate various types of soft tissue.

Although gelatin can simulate the density and viscosity of living human tissue, it lacks the structure of tissue. Gelatin doesn't bleed or have nerves or vessels. In addition, the human anatomy contains organs, muscle, and fat and is supported by a skeleton.

### **Background**

Ballistic gelatin's use as a tissue simulant in a variety of research scenarios over the past several decades provides numerous case histories with which to consider its efficacy. Some of the earlier efforts to use gelatin as a tissue simulant to model ballistic information date back to 1960. These models used various measurement techniques to measure the kinetic energy of a projectile (energy loss, energy deposited) as it traveled through a block of gelatin. Dzieman (1960) of the Biophysics Division, Edgewood Arsenal, used a 20% gelatin at 10°C model and high-speed photography to relate a missile's probability of incapacitation to the energy lost by the missile during passage through 1-15cm of gelatin. This energy loss criterion ( $E_{1-15}$ ) was used to estimate bullet lethality through 1968, along with a Ballistic Research Laboratories (BRL) x-ray gelatin technique, until studies showed that a ballistic pendulum system (BRL) was more efficient and cost effective at measuring deposited energy in simulants (DKE casualty criterion). In 1975, Edgewood Arsenal proposed a more complicated mathematical model for Expected Kinetic Energy (EKE), using a 30cm block of gelatin, Dynafax high-speed photography, and a computer program for calculations (Kokinakis et al. 1979). Early models were not compared to living tissue in a quantitative or reproducible way.

Then in the mid-1980's, researchers at the Letterman Army Institute of Research (LAIR) began publishing papers in professional journals based on their model for ballistic research and, in particular, the work of Dr. Martin Fackler. These studies were based on the measurement of projectile path and the projectile tissue interaction. In the first of many papers in the mid to late 1980's, researchers at LAIR used both live swine (50-70

## **BALLISTIC GELATIN**

kg) and gelatin blocks to test bullets and subsequently compared the results. The animals were shot through the soft tissue of the hind leg from a distance of three meters, using the gelatin to ‘catch’ the bullets after they were shot through the animals. A LAIR procedure for 10% gelatin blocks at 4°C was used here and in future studies with a few refinements. Penetration of the bullet into the gelatin was measured by slicing the blocks along the bullet track. Only three blocks and five swine were used for each of two bullets tested. (Fackler et al. 1984)

Although the paper did not include specific comparisons between gelatin and animal tissue, the LAIR team and many other researchers afterward cited this published paper as the foundation for using Fackler’s gelatin model as an approximate or equivalent substitute for animal tissue (Fackler et al. Mar 1984, Fackler and Malinowski 1985, Fackler 1987, Fackler et al. 1988, Fackler 1988, Korac et al. 2002, Uzar et al. 2003, etc.). Based on the previous two Fackler papers, Fackler and Malinowski 1985 states that the depth penetration measured in living swine leg muscle was reproduced in the gelatin within 3%. It was claimed that bullet deformation and the spatial distribution of bullet fragments were also duplicated. The paper also states that (unpublished) data showed that the temporary cavity produced by an example bullet in an example swine test was reflected within 8% in the gelatin.

Fackler and Malinowski 1985 further clarifies Fackler’s 10% gelatin at 4°C model. Many researchers have used and/or currently use this gelatin model for ballistic tests, including the FBI and Secret Service (Fackler 1988 in IDR). The gelatin used is 250 A ordnance type gelatin, Kind and Knox Co., Sioux City, IA. It is molded 10% by weight aqueous solution into 25 X 25 X 50 cm blocks. The blocks are placed end to end to capture the full bullet path. They are stored in airtight plastic bags at 4°C until use and used within “a few minutes” of being removed from the refrigerator. The blocks are shot with projectiles from three meters. Measurements of the projectile’s velocity are made with a chronograph, and biplanar x-rays are used to determine bullet and fragment sites. The blocks are then cut along the bullet path to measure penetration depth, permanent cavity, and temporary cavity. A final “wound profile” is drawn to include:

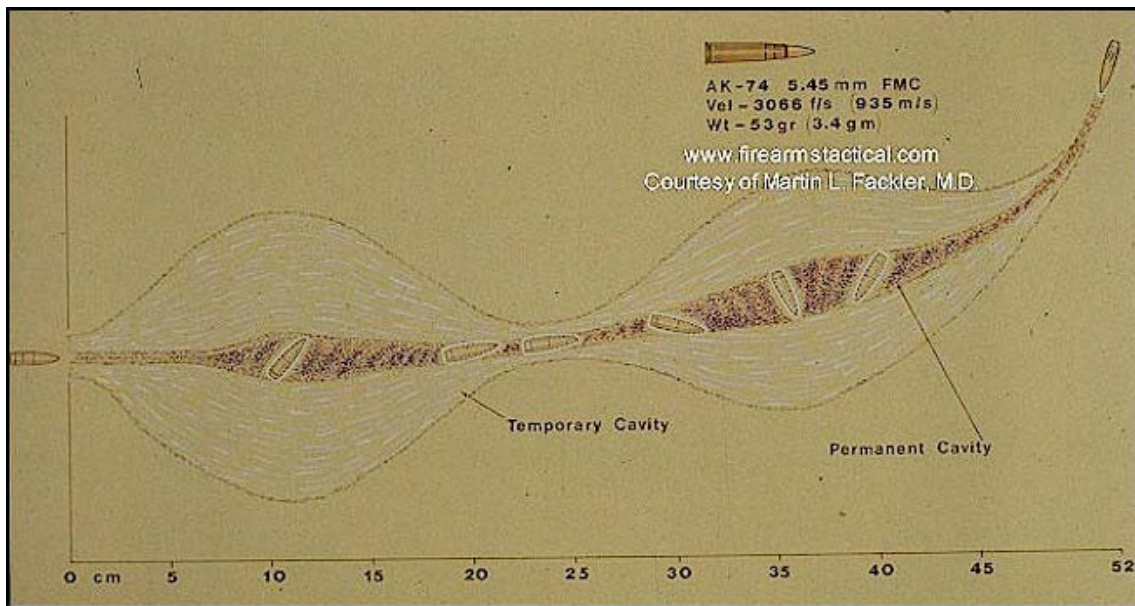
- amount, type, and location of tissue disruption
- projectile mass, velocity, construction, and shape (before and after shot)
- projectile deformation and fragmentation pattern where appropriate
- scale applicable in two dimensions for comparison

### **Dynamics of a Bullet in Gelatin**

The motion of a bullet in a dense medium such as gelatin or tissue is determined by the Newtonian and viscous forces on the bullet that are in turn influenced by the shape and composition of the bullet. The Newtonian forces are imparted to the bullet by the rapid expansion of the gases in the firing chamber. The viscous forces that slow the bullet result from the motion of the bullet through the medium in which it travels.

As the bullet moves down the barrel of the weapon it engages the raised areas of the barrel (lands) that are designed to spin the bullet to impart a gyroscopic stability to the bullet's trajectory. Ballistic gelatin is about 800 times as dense as air so that all the effects caused on the bullet in air are highly magnified in gelatin. For example, if the bullet should develop a yawing motion about its line of trajectory, that instability will increase greatly when the bullet encounters the gelatin.

Figure 1 shows the typical orientations of a rifle bullet in a dense medium as the bullet penetrates the medium and the viscous forces overcome the Newtonian forces. The passage of the bullet carves a permanent cavity and generates a temporary cavity. The temporary cavity collapses to the boundaries of the permanent cavity once the momentum imparted by the bullet to the medium contiguous to the trajectory has been overcome by the elasticity of the medium. Gunshot wounds exhibit corresponding reactions in that tissue that was in the permanent cavity is crushed while tissue in the temporary cavity suffers injury ranging from severe adjacent to the permanent cavity to more moderate as the distance from the permanent cavity increases.



**Figure 1 – Trajectory of a Rifle Bullet in Ballistic Gelatin**

Figure 2 shows a bullet from a handgun in gelatin. There is only one temporary cavity and the bullet does not yaw. The muzzle velocity of handgun bullets is much lower than that of rifle bullets. For example, the muzzle velocity of the rifle bullet in Figure 1 is 3066 ft/sec while that of the handgun in Figure 2 is 880 ft/sec. This limits the penetration of the handgun bullet so that it stops before the yaw forces can cause the bullet to rotate.



## BALLISTIC GELATIN

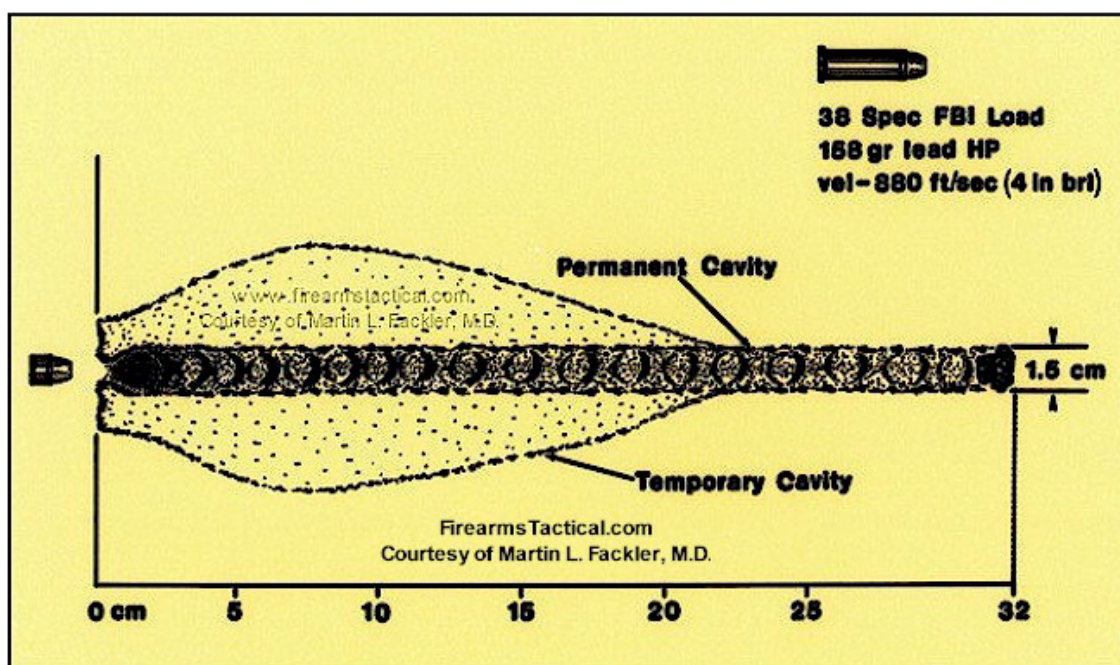


Figure 2 – Trajectory of a Handgun Bullet in Ballistic Gelatin

Additional examples of test firings in ballistic gelatin are shown in Appendix I – Fackler Wound Profiles.

### Procedures for Preparing Ballistic Gelatins and Limitations

Current uses of ordnance gelatin as a tissue simulant include many models and measurement devices. Gelatin setups can include using the gelatin blocks alone or with coverings to simulate clothing, car doors, walls, etc. Gelatin is also used in conjunction with animal research. The gelatin blocks are placed post-animal to catch a projectile after it passes through the animal (Fackler, Breteau et al. 1989, Fackler et al. 1988). Gelatin is also used to suspend animal tissue such as arteries (Amato et al. 1970) and bones (Schyma et al. 1997, Orłowski et al. 1982) for ballistic tests. Devices used in measuring the results of gelatin ballistics tests have included x-ray technology and high-speed cine. New methods combine the gelatin model with computed tomography and digital processing of images to allow accurate numerical analysis of the characteristics of the permanent cavity (Korac et al. 2001 and 2002). (For current procedures and uses of ballistic gelatin see Appendix II. It includes two protocols and references for others, including the FBI mixing procedure.

One of the biggest advantages of using gelatin as a tissue simulant in ballistic research is that the gelatin model provides a visualization of the events, including the projectile path and the projectile-tissue interaction. Gelatin profiles measure bullet penetration, deformation, fragmentation, and yaw along the path, as well as tissue disruption from

both crush (permanent cavity) and stretch (temporary cavity). The projectile can be easily recovered, making this model ideal for forensics, and the wound profile visualization has proved to be a tool for wound treatment.

Other reasons the gelatin model is useful involve the expense and complications associated with animal models. Some gelatin models have been calibrated to reproduce measurements observed in living animal tissue. This allows prediction of wound characteristics for a given projectile without animal testing. Gelatin can also be used in conjunction with and to enhance animal testing.

One of the major limitations of using ballistic gelatin as a tissue simulant is procedural difference among researchers. Gelatin consistency (firmness) and other properties are known to vary due to temperature and composition. Several different procedures employed vary by a few factors, leaving inconsistencies between results and difficulties in comparing data. For example, one standard is 10% gelatin at 4°C (Fackler's work), while others use 20% at 10°C (Amato et al. 1970, NATO standard circa Fackler 1988 in IDR, Celens et al. 1996, Korac et al. 2001). Physical preparation of the gelatin may cause variations. Methods have used cold or hot water to dissolve the powdered gel. It was realized later that heating the gel above 40°C weakens gel strength and viscosity (Fackler 1987, Fackler and Malinowski 1988). Also some methods are not concise. Gelatin used at 10°C is often taken from the refrigerator and allowed to "warm up" to 10°C, not accounting for differences in temperature from the outside to the inside of the block. As well, some researchers fail to calibrate tissue simulants at all.

Another area of limitation is the difficulty extrapolating the data for tissue simulants to use for living human beings. Fackler's research compares his gelatin model to live 50-70kg swine muscle and fresh (within one hour) dead swine muscle. In his comparison, original data is limited, and he sometimes references "unpublished data" to support his argument. Permanent cavities like the ones seen with fragmenting bullets in muscle are not well reproduced in gelatin. There is also less visible damage in muscle response to temporary cavity than seen in gelatin simulations. There are many more concerns with translating tissue simulation research to human muscle information, and the situation is worse yet when extended to entire living human beings. Simply put, gelatin blocks prepared correctly are homogeneous, where as living humans are heterogeneous. Differences in density and composition of human tissue such as bone and dense organs (like the liver) pose problems for the gelatin model.

Gelatin blocks used for ballistics testing are only good for one shot. As a result, some researchers find using gelatin time consuming and expensive. Additionally, the user must still interpret the data collected from wound profiles to determine projectile efficiency or lethality.

In spite of difficulties with cost and consistency, gelatin has been used for over 40 years as a tool for ballistic research. It continues to be viable as an approximation for soft,

## **BALLISTIC GELATIN**

elastic animal tissue and an alternative to some animal research. But, the key to its success and future use may be the application of consistent, calibrated protocols based on proven methods and the use of caution in interpreting data for human comparison.

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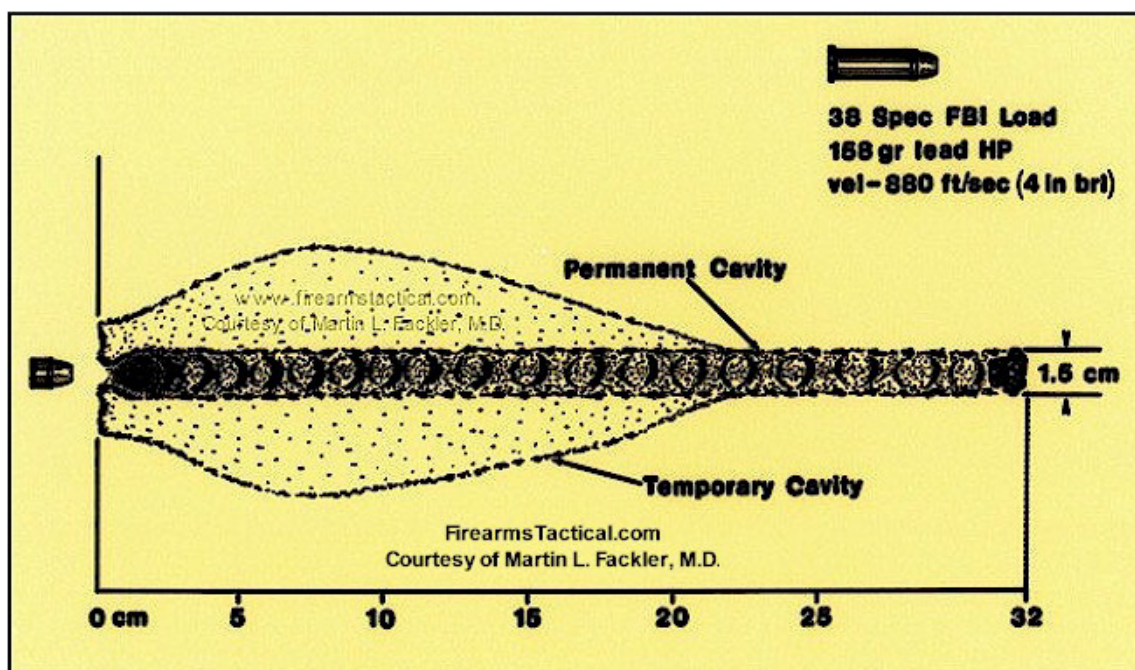
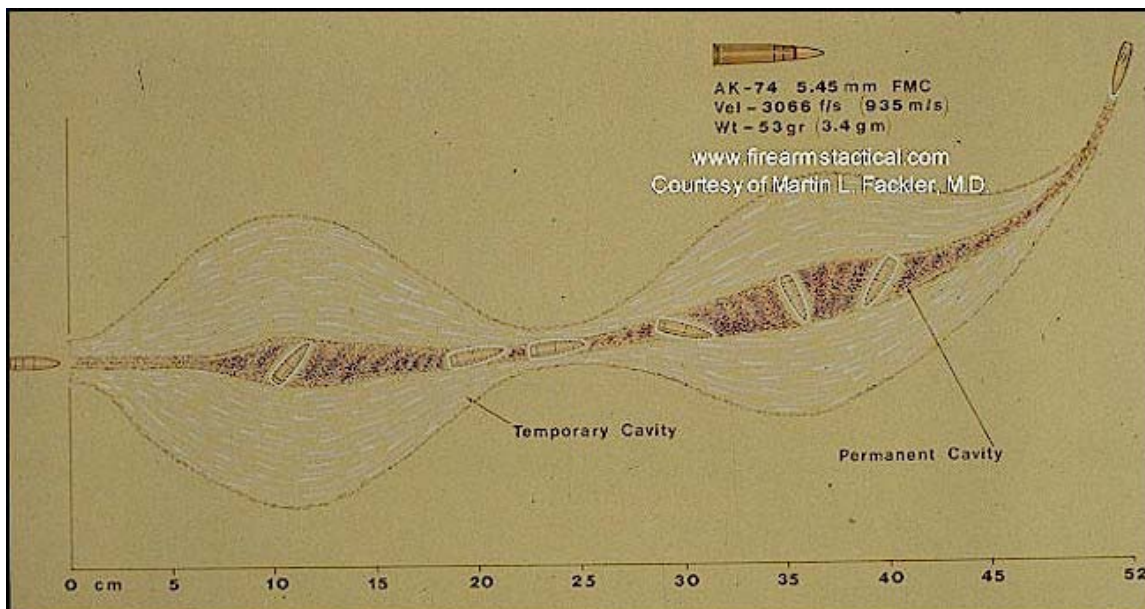
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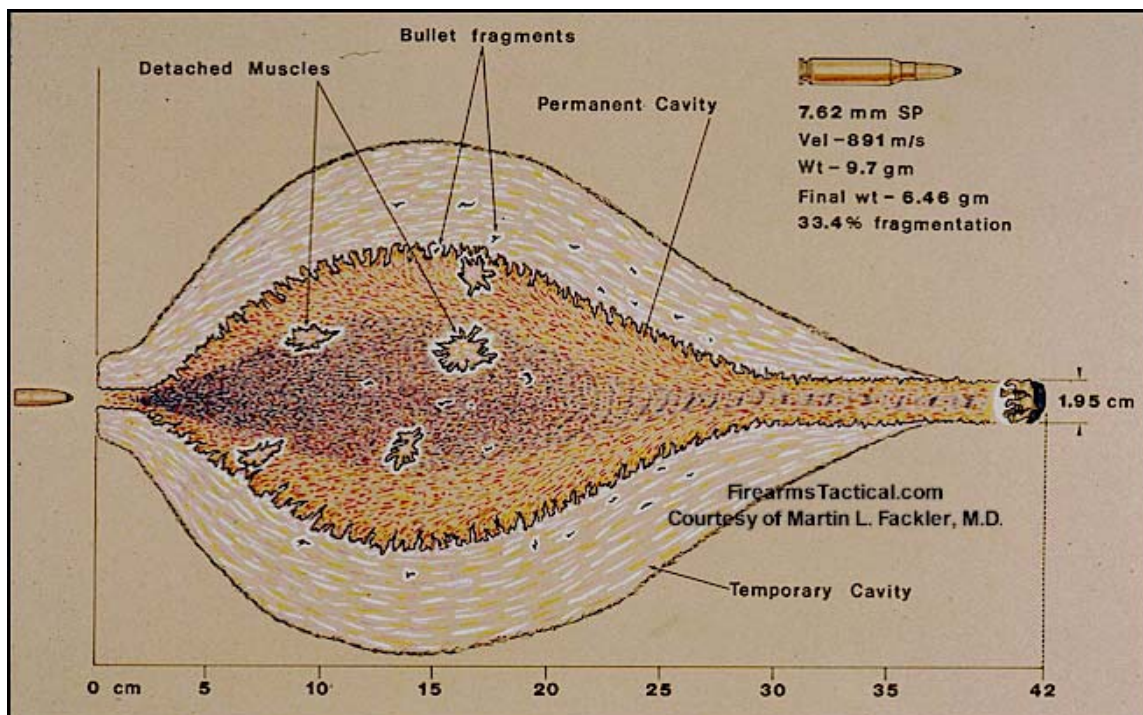
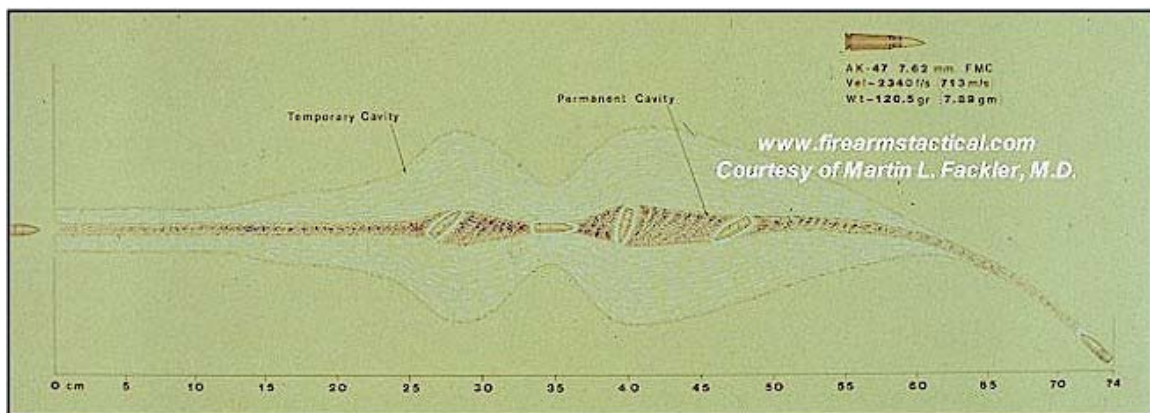
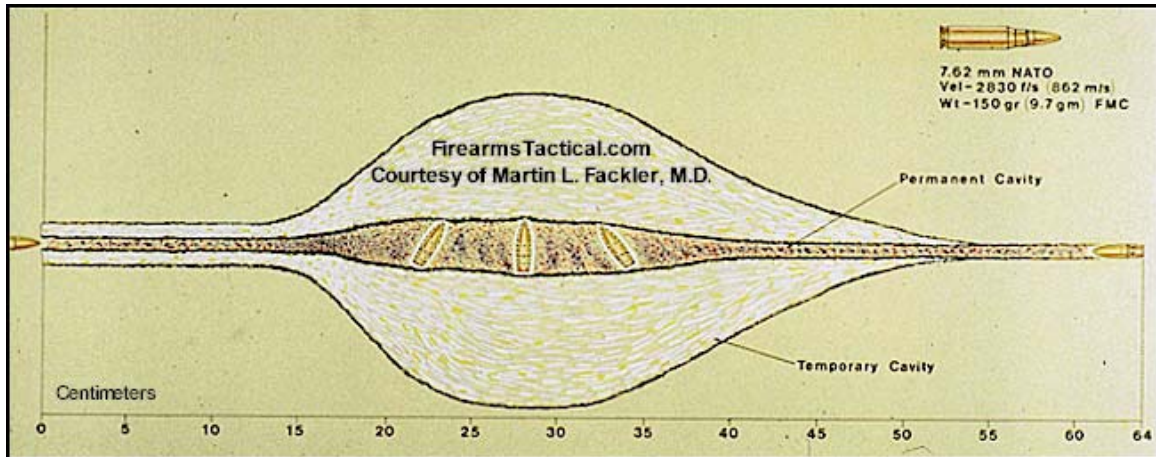


## Appendix I – Fackler Wound Profiles

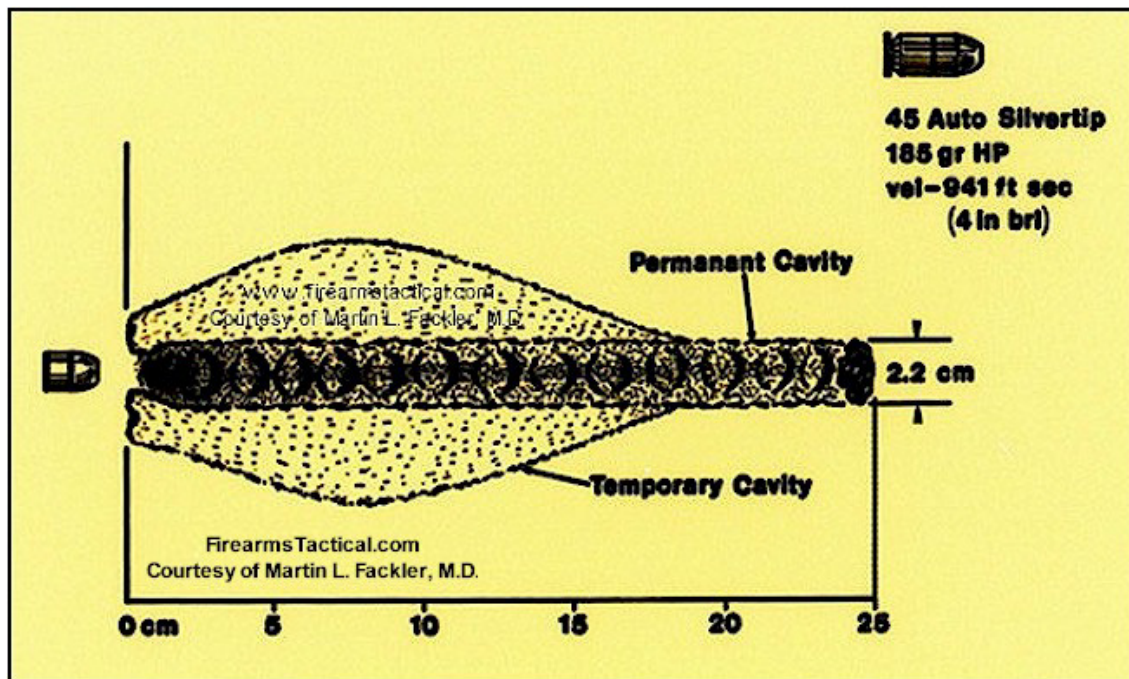
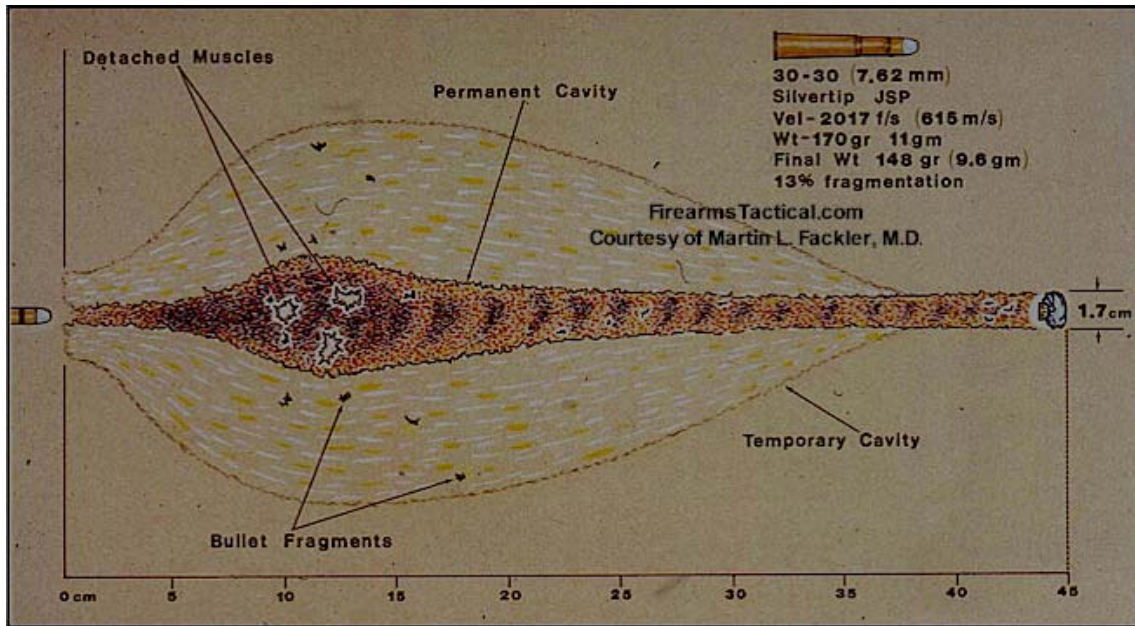




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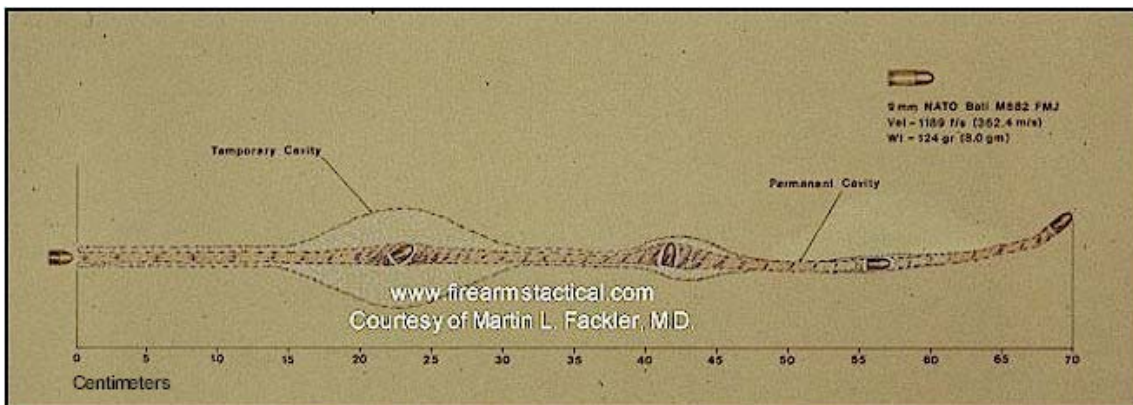
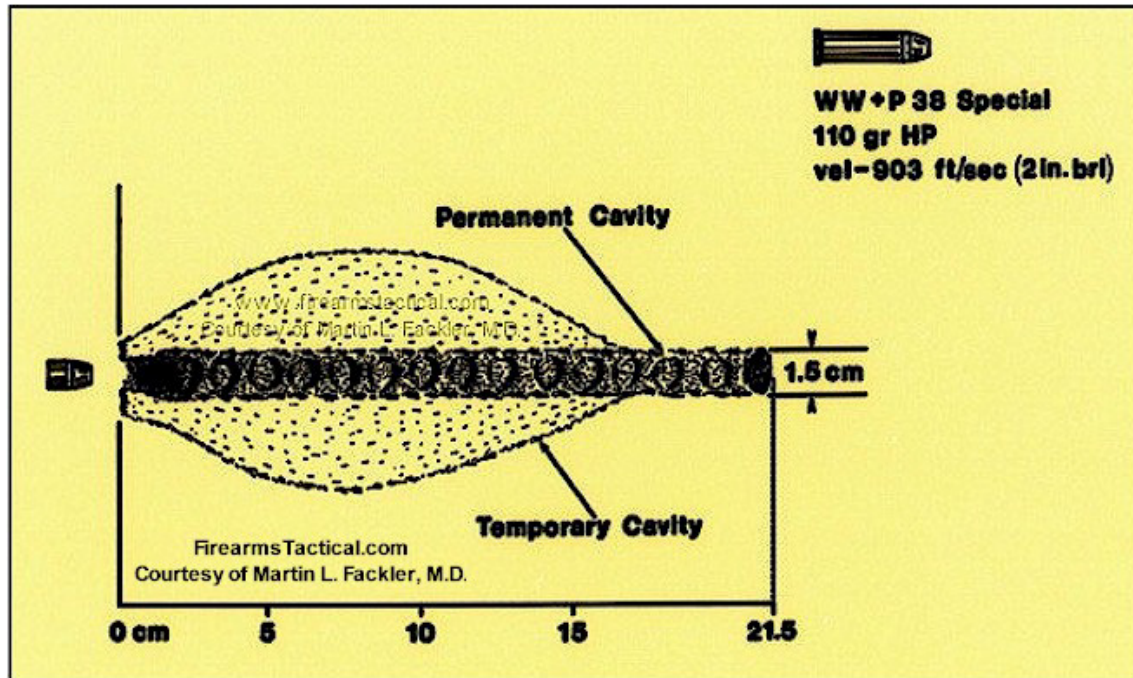


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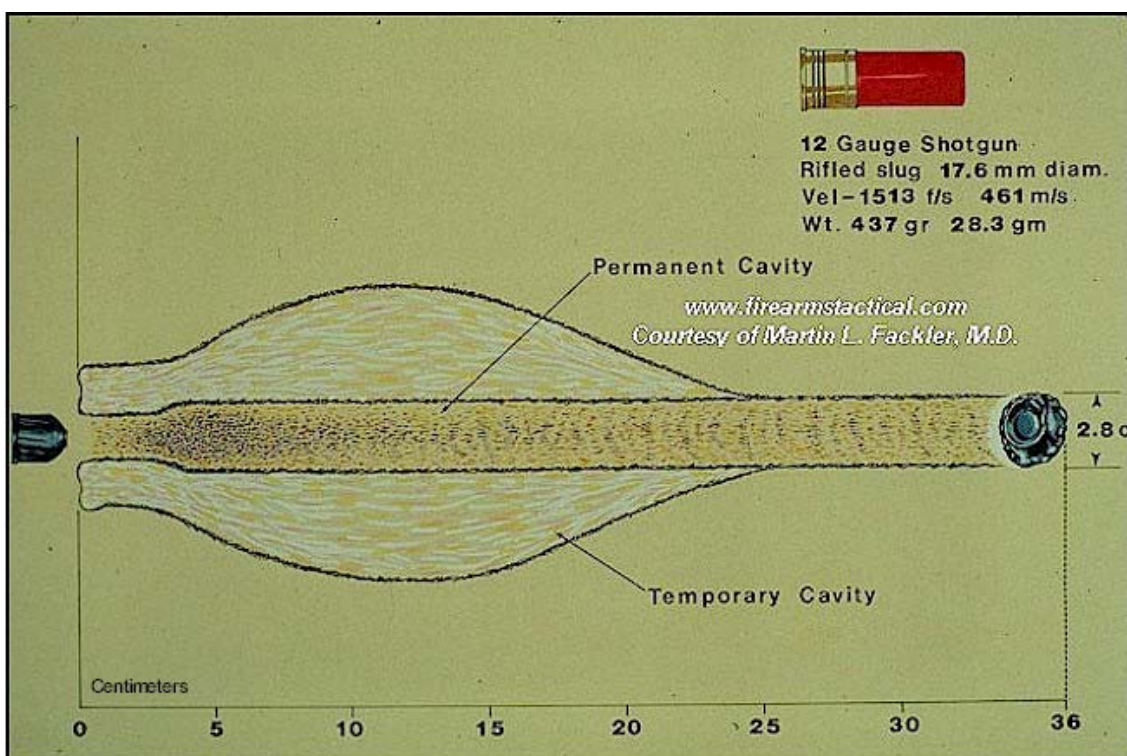
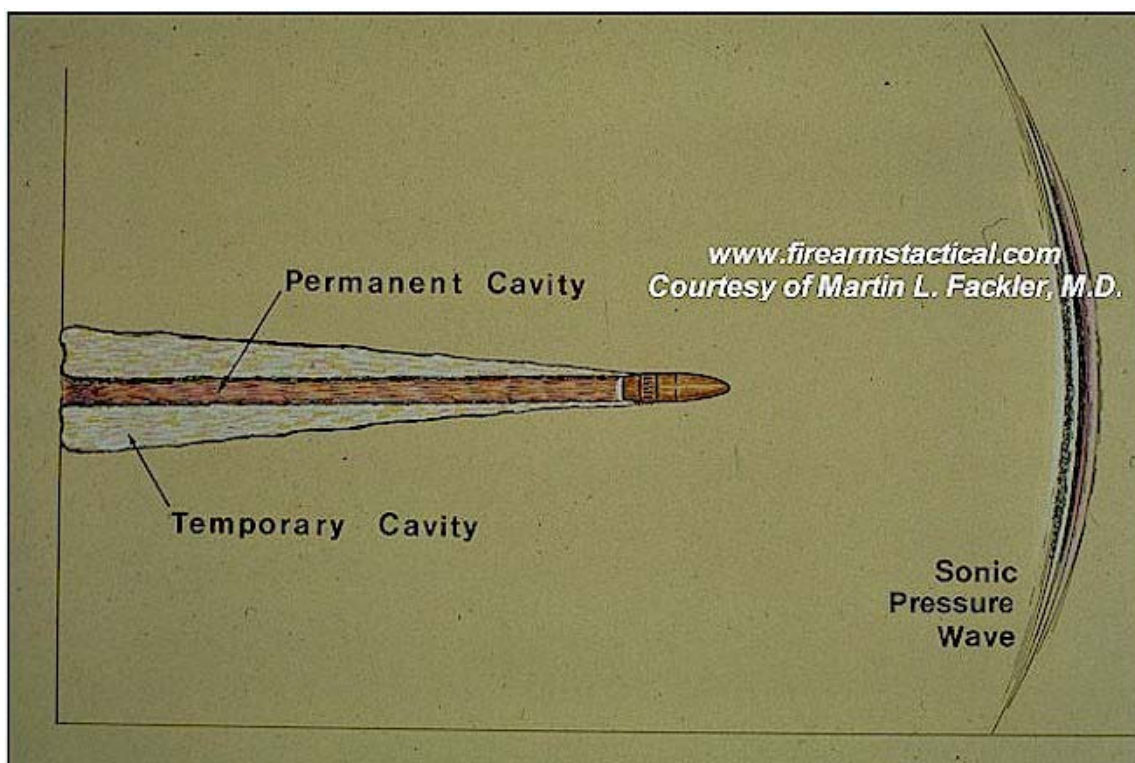




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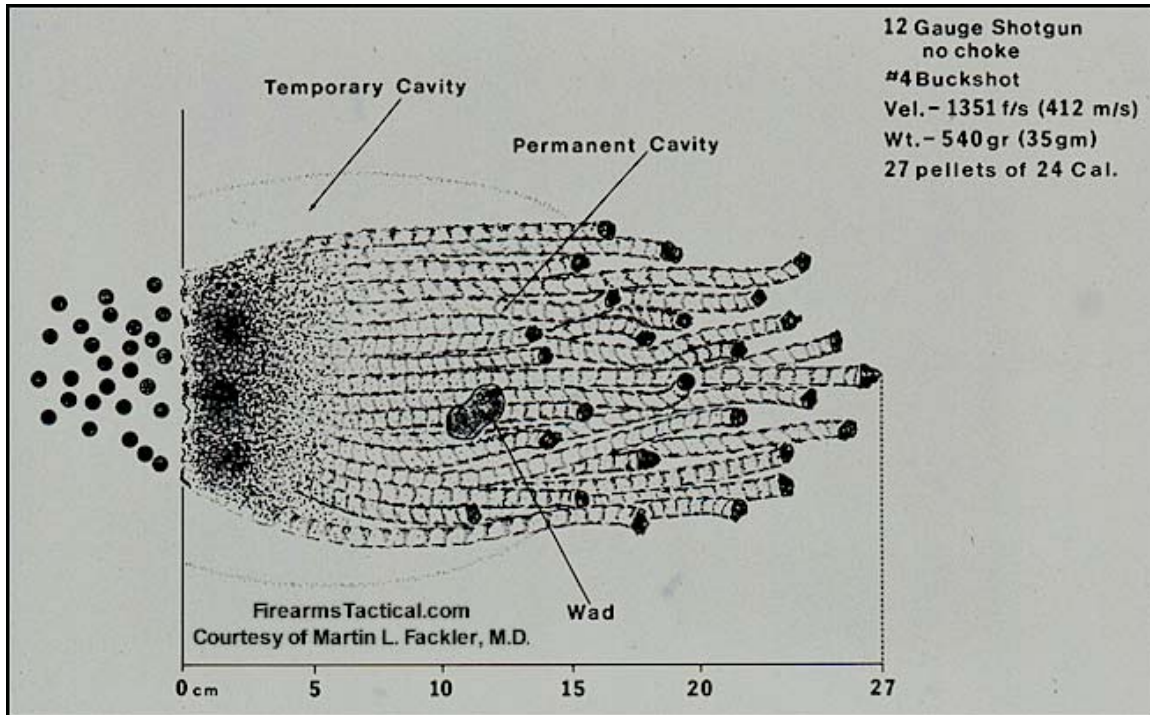


## BALLISTIC GELATIN





## BALLISTIC GELATIN



## **Appendix II - Fackler Gelatin Model**

Fackler's 10% gelatin at 4°C:

- 250 A ordnance type gelatin, Kind and Knox Co., Sioux City, IA
- molded 10% by weight aqueous solution into 25 X 25 X 50 cm block (placed end to end to capture full bullet path)
- stored in airtight plastic bags at 4°C
- shot from 3 meters at 4°C (within “a few minutes” of being removed from the refrigerator)
- measurements
  - o velocities measured with a chronograph
  - o biplanar x-rays to determine bullet and fragment sites
  - o blocks cut along bullet path to measure penetration depth, permanent cavity and temporary cavity
  - o all produce “wound profile”
    - amount, type and location of tissue disruption
    - projectile mass, velocity, construction and shape (before and after shot)
    - projectile deformation and fragmentation pattern where applicable
    - scale included for comparison
- (Fackler and Malinowski 1985)

## **BALLISTIC GELATIN**

## **Appendix III – Gelatin Resources**

Gelatin ordering information

### **Vyse Gelatin Co.**

<http://www.vyse.com/vysehomepage.htm>

*5010 N. Rose St.*

*Schiller Park, IL 60176*

**Phone Numbers:**

*1-800-533-2152*

*1-847-678-4780*

**Fax Number:**

*1-847-678-0329*

**Email:**

Sales: [sales@vyse.com](mailto:sales@vyse.com)

Tech Help: [techhelp@vyse.com](mailto:techhelp@vyse.com)

Information: [info@vyse.com](mailto:info@vyse.com)

Vyse sells to the FBI, regional police departments, test labs, ammunition manufacturers.

Prices depend on quantities sold, for example:

25 lbs. is \$4.65 per pound plus freight

50 lbs. is \$4.50 per pound plus freight

100 lbs. is \$4.35 per pound plus freight

### **GELITA USA Inc.**

[http://www.gelita.com/DGF-](http://www.gelita.com/DGF-deutsch/gruppe/gruppe_standorte_nord_amerika_usa_sc.html?reload_coolmenus)

[deutsch/gruppe/gruppe\\_standorte\\_nord\\_amerika\\_usa\\_sc.html?reload\\_coolmenus](http://www.gelita.com/DGF-deutsch/gruppe/gruppe_standorte_nord_amerika_usa_sc.html?reload_coolmenus)

Mailing:

P.O. Box 927

Sioux City, IA 51102, USA

Plant:

2445 Port Neal Industrial Rd.

Sergeant Bluff, IA 51054, USA

Tel: +1 (712) 943-5516

Fax: +1 (712) 943-3372

sales contact: Lanette Falk Ext.623

Formerly Kind and Knox (name change 6/3/2003)

Price approx. \$5 per pound depending on order size



## **BALLISTIC GELATIN**

Appendix - Ballistic gelatin blocks

<http://www.hpwhite.com/601-02.pdf>

Appendix - A Practical guide and specification for preparation of 10% ballistic gelatin

<http://www.logicsouth.com/~lcoble/dir5/gelprep.txt>

Appendix - Ed Harris recipe

<http://www.recguns.com/Sources/XD3.html>

Appendix - FBI Ballistic gelatin mixing procedure (Vyse)

[http://www.vyse.com/gelatin\\_for\\_ballistic\\_testing.htm](http://www.vyse.com/gelatin_for_ballistic_testing.htm)

Appendix - FBI Ballistic Test Protocol

<http://greent.com/40Page/general/fbitest.htm>

Appendix - FBI penetration testing (Vyse)

[http://www.vyse.com/FBI\\_PENETRATION\\_TESTING.htm](http://www.vyse.com/FBI_PENETRATION_TESTING.htm)

Appendix - INS National Firearms Unit Ballistic Gelatin Test Protocol

<http://www.firearmstactical.com/tacticalbriefs/volume4/number1/article412.htm>

Appendix - Vyse Gelatin Co MSDS data sheet

<http://www.vyse.com/MSDSgelatin.htm>



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